

DANGER OF CONTINUAL CARNALITY

By Dan Trygg

What is carnality? - I Cor. 3:1-3. The word “carnal” means “fleshly”. Paul uses this to describe life lived according to the self-principle rather than according to the Holy Spirit.

LIFE IN THE FLESH

self-pleasure
self-indulgence
self-understanding - limited to human/
personal perspective
self-denial - denial of things to self
self-will
self-effort
self-ability
self-motivated
self-resources
self-centered

LIFE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

live to please God.
obedience to God
live by the wisdom and leading of God

denial of self
self-controlling power of the Spirit
Spirit-enabling
Spirit ability
Spirit motivation - love
Spirit resources - unlimited
Christ centered

Marks of Carnality

1. Spiritual infancy or immaturity - I Cor. 3:1 “babes in Christ”. Cf. Heb. 5:12,13; Eph. 4:14.
2. Spiritual dullness - inability to understand spiritual truth. I Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:11; cf. I Cor. 2:14-16.
3. The milk diet - inability to digest spiritual meat. I Cor. 3:3; Heb. 5:12-14; cf. I Pet. 2:2.

“Digest” implies more than mere knowledge. There is an inability to receive or withdraw spiritual strength and sustenance from the deeper truths. This is either an inability to *see* the practical implications (cf. #2 above), or an unwillingness, through rebellion or carelessness, to *act upon* what is revealed. Thus the Word becomes unprofitable, and is eventually lost. Cf. Jas. 1:21-25.

Why this inability? Heb. 5:13-14 - the carnal Christian is “not accustomed to the word of righteousness”.

Vs. 13 - The phrase “not accustomed” means:

- 1.) Unacquainted with the word, i.e., ignorance.
- 2.) Inexperienced in the reality of it, i.e., the word is untested in obedience or by faith.

Thus the word of God is not a custom in one’s life in thought or action. It is foreign to one’s mind and lifestyle.

Vs. 14 - The carnal Christian has not followed the mature, who because of their continual using of the word have exercised, disciplined, and trained their senses to discern truth in both thought and life. (We derive the words “gymnasium” and “gymnastics” from the Greek word translated as “train” here. It implies “working out”, spiritually.) You can sense how much the word is a custom in the lives of these mature believers. Cf. Jas. 1:25.

4. A divisive spirit - Jealousy, strife, comparison, competition, personality cults, pride, and division mark the lives of those walking in the flesh (I Cor. 3:3 [cf. 1:11-13; 3:4-7, 21-23]; Jas. 3:14-16). This divisive spirit is manifested as an attitude, and often is revealed in our speech with others of our particular group.
5. Sin in the life - Sin is a work of the flesh. The Holy Spirit will not lead us into sin. Cf. Gal. 5:16-21. A very telltale sign of carnality is a focus on sensuality. Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:17-19. Some “acceptable sins” in our society such as materialism, overeating, drunkenness, and the emphasis upon heightening the sensual in dress, advertisements, etc., are rooted in this work of the flesh.
6. A lack of the fruit of the Spirit - Gal. 5:22-24; Jas. 3:13-18; I Cor. 13:1-3. Especially a lack of love

and a servant heart.

7. A non-supernatural life - A Christian's life should have the mark of the presence of God upon it:
in power - I Cor. 2:4,5; 4:19,20; Jn. 14:12; Acts 1:8
in character - Rom. 14:17; Jn. 13:34,35; Phil. 4:6,7; II Cor. 4:6,7.
Paul's word of rebuke and reproach to the Corinthian church was a statement of this very fact - "are you not walking like mere men?" (I Cor. 3:3,4).
8. Susceptibility to doctrinal error - Eph. 4:14; of. II Tim. 3:6,7; II Cor. 11:2-4; Gal. 1:6-9.
9. A tendency toward legalism or antinomianism -

Legalism - Attempting to conform one's life to an outward standard of righteousness (e.g., the law of the Scriptures, or even a particular lifestyle idealized by one's religious peers) resulting in an outward Pharisaical righteousness produced by discipline and self effort. This was the heresy in the Galatian church that Paul addressed in such angry terms. Casuistic ethics.

Antinomianism - An ethical position that believes that there are no moral standards. We can do as we desire, since grace is covering our sin. The Nicolaitans in Rev. 2:6,15 and the "Jezebel" of Rev. 2:20, apparently were of this tendency. A more subtle form can be seen in the widespread complacency of sleepy-eyed Christians who *suppose* themselves to be under God's grace and thus relax into a selfish, worldly existence with occasional appropriate religious overtones. Such a lifestyle is not true Christianity, and is soundly condemned in Scripture. Cf. Phil. 3:17-19; Lk. 9:23-25,57-62; Rev. 3:14-21; II Pet.1:5-11.

10. A tendency not only to *misunderstand*, but, in the extreme, to even *oppose* those who are led by the Spirit. I Cor. 2:15-3:3; Gal. 4:29; 5:16,17.
11. Tendency to walk by sight rather than by faith. This is caused by skepticism, doubt, or fear to trust God. Heb. 11:1; II Cor. 4:16-18; Mt. 14:28-31; 16:5-12.
12. Tendency to seek spiritual mediators rather than a personal relationship with God. Ex. 20:19; I Sam. 8:4-7.

Cf. I Cor. 3:1,2 where the milk diet for spiritual babes implies someone to supply the milk. There is an unhealthy comfort in giving responsibility to another for your spiritual growth.

You do not have to be concerned for your life then. Further, when things are not working out you can blame your leader. Unfortunately, God does not see it that way. "The soul who sins will die", declares the Lord (Ezk. 18:4). Christianity was never designed to be a ritualistic spectator experience, it requires individual relationship to God. The Body of Christ will never be what it was intended to be as long as the members refuse to be personally responsible for their own walk with God, and His calling to ministry for them. Cf. Eph. 4:11-16.

The Scriptures themselves can be abused this way. Instead of leading us into a living, communicating relationship with God Himself, the Bible can become the "answer book" which we use to justify our truncated experience. Instead of needing to be ready at any time to respond to the voice of God within us, we can control this book and listen to it at the times, and to the extent, that we choose.

In summary then, the carnal Christian is a person who is born of God, but is not living in the moment-by-moment leading, life, and power of the Holy Spirit. Instead, he or she often lives by the limits of his or her own resources, i.e., by his or her own understanding of what God's will is, his or her own self-manufactured imitation of God's love and goodness, and by the power of his or her own self-discipline and self-effort. Whether sincere but unequipped, ...or whether willfully choosing the world in areas of his or her life..., the common mark of carnality is a restriction of the experience and expression of the life of Jesus within one's own life.